

Fairbury Farm Equipment Dealers for Fifty-Two Years

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Samuel Henry Ziegenhorn was born in 1856 in Alsace-Lorraine, France. His parents were Christian H. Ziegenhorn and Anna D. Schmidt. This family came to America in 1865 and lived at various times in Peoria, Morton, and Cissna Park. In 1879, Samuel married Miss Elizabeth Zimmerman in Pontiac, Illinois.

Mr. and Mrs. Samuel Ziegenhorn settled on a farm six miles southeast of Fairbury. They had twelve children. In 1909, they moved to a farm near Muscatine, Iowa. They farmed there until 1918 when he retired, and they moved to town. Samuel Ziegenhorn passed away in 1942. His wife Elizabeth died in 1958 in Muscatine.

One of Samuel and Elizabeth's twelve children was Aaron F. Ziegenhorn. He was born in 1881 in Fairbury. He married Nathalia "Nettie" Lambert Ramseyer in Peoria in 1909. Nettie was the daughter of Jacob Ramseyer and Mary Steidinger. She was born in a sod hut in Harper, Kansas. Her parents were from Forrest, but they tried farming in Kansas on a homestead claim. When her parent's dry-dirt farming experience proved less than successful, the family returned to Fairbury.

After Aaron and Nettie were married, they began farming in Eliza Township. This township was in Mercer County in the northwest part of the state along the Mississippi River. Their first two of six children were born in Mercer County. Then they returned to the Fairbury area and operated a farm four miles northwest of Fairbury.

In 1929, Aaron and his family moved to town in Fairbury. Aaron Ziegenhorn began working in the farm implement section of Walton's Department store. This implement division was located in what is now Antiques and Uniques. Aaron's son Cliff Ziegenhorn also joined the implement department with his father. Aaron worked for Walton's for eleven years. In 1939, Walton's decided to exit the farm implement business. Aaron and his son Cliff took over the implement business and the John Deere dealership. They named their new company Ziegenhorn and Son. They moved the business to the G. Y. McDowell building north of Walton's on Third Street. That building came with a safe from G. Y. McDowell's banking business.

In those early years of the business, farmers often traded many items towards the purchase of a new tractor. They often traded livestock, other machinery, or bushels of grain to make the purchase.

Aaron and his wife, Nettie, had six children. The oldest son, Cliff Ziegenhorn was born in 1912. The next oldest son, John William Ziegenhorn, was born in 1923. Their youngest son was Robert Lee Ziegenhorn who was born in 1927. All three boys attended Fairbury

schools. Robert was one of the most fabled athletes in Fairbury's high-school history. He won eleven of a possible twelve letters at Fairbury Township High School.

The Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor in Hawaii plunged Fairbury into World War II. Cliff Ziegenhorn attempted to enlist in the Army, but they would not take him because he had suffered from polio. John W. Ziegenhorn entered the Army Engineers in 1943 at Scott Field, Illinois. He served in the European Theatre. He was discharged from Camp Grant in 1946 as a Sergeant.

Robert L. Ziegenhorn entered the Army Infantry in July of 1945 at Fort Sheridan in Illinois. He was discharged in November of 1946 at Fort Sill, Oklahoma, as a Technician Fifth Grade. In the U.S. Army, Robert was undefeated as a pitcher for the Truck Battalion, 35th Quartermaster Corps., at Fort Sill, Oklahoma.

After the war ended, both John and Robert joined their brother Cliff in the family business. They had to change the name to Ziegenhorn and Sons because three sons were now involved with the company.

Robert played with two area semi-pro baseball teams. Those teams were Larry's Farmalls, sponsored by Larry LaRochelle's dealership in Chatsworth; and Leo Lamb's Pontiac Stone team. The Washington Senators of the American League were interested in Robert, who by then had a bone chip in his elbow. Robert elected to stay with the family business in Fairbury.

In 1962, Ziegenhorn & Sons decided they had outgrown their old facility on 3rd Street north of Walton's. They needed more space to assemble larger machines, for maintenance of customers' machines, and their essential parts business. They also required larger lots to display equipment for sale. They decided to build a new facility west of Fairbury on Route 24. They purchased the land from Jay Carter. Construction was started on the new 120 foot by 90-foot building in December of 1962. They moved the G. Y. McDowell safe from their old building to their new building. On March 9, 1964, they held an Open House ceremony in their new facility.

In May of 1964, company founder Aaron Ziegenhorn passed away in Fairbury at age eighty-two. The Blade noted that Aaron was one of Fairbury's senior businessmen who served the needs of area farmers for over thirty-five years. The Blade also recounted that Aaron was a calm and friendly person who added much to Fairbury's community esprit de corps. His wife, Nettie Ziegenhorn, passed away in 1979.

The first of the three brothers to pass away was Robert L. Ziegenhorn in 1992 at age 65. His death prompted the two remaining brothers to decide to liquidate the family business. Ziegenhorn and Sons had been in business for fifty-two years. One of the longest-serving employees was Everett Wenger, who started with the firm in 1951. The massive liquidation sale was held in January of 1993. Mike White bought the land and buildings used by the business. This site is now the home of Alexander Lumber, and the G. Y. McDowell safe is still used every day.

Cliff Ziegenhorn passed away in 1996 at age eighty-four. The last brother to pass away was John Ziegenhorn in 2013 at age 90. Ziegenhorn and Sons were a primary contributor to the success of Fairbury area farmers for over fifty years.

JOHN DEERE

FOX **HAHN SPRAYERS** **KEWANEE**



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